

Letter from J. Sitzenstatter to Alexander Graham Bell, January 2, 1917

X J. Sitzenstatter. Veracruz.Ver. Jany 2. 1917. P.O.Box 241 Veracruz, Ver. Prof.
Alexander Graham Bell BOSTON MASS. U.S.A. Dear Sir;

A friend of mine, knowing my connection with the development of the telephone since its earliest struggles, kindly sent me a copy of the "National Geographic Magazine" of March with its description of the celebration of the 40th anniversary of your invention,—the greatest and most useful one of the past century. In perusing these pages my thoughts wandered back to 39 years ago, when Mr. O.E. Madden, sent out by you and your Boston friends as an apostle of the then great "What-is-it" came to Buffalo N.Y., and interesting Mr. E.J.Hall Sr. and his bright son E.J.Hall Jr., laid the foundation of what subsequently became one of the most powerful organizations on earth, and gave us the first instructions in the practical application of your invention. These recollections induce me to add my humble share to the tribute offered you on the occasion of your day of honour.

After 39 years of continuous service in the telephone business I felt sentimentally touched on reading of the perfect success and magnitud your invention has attained as set forth by the various orators on the occasion, and a slight and pardonable access of vanity makes me feel, that I too, have added my little mite to the great cause, although my feeble efforts may have only been a little drop in the sea.

Looking at the picture representing the invited guests at dinner, I recognized with great pleasure several of the faces of the old pioneers, such as your good self, Mr. Vail, Watson etc. and with sad heart missed some who had gone home and whom fate denied the honour and satisfaction of seeing their work completed. Among these comes in first line Mr. Hubbard, whose merits are second to none but your own.

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I take pleasure in enclosing you a few letters which show you that Mr Hubbard as well as Mr Grossmann honoured me with their friendship and confidence.

These letters I have always kept jealously as a souvenir of the great friend and the great times when we were battling shoulder to shoulder for your rights and to plant the banner of the B.T.Co. in the remotest spots on earth.—

A few lines will suffice to tell you how I spent the past 39 years and thereby help “making history”.

When we had Buffalo successfully started I was sent to Rochester with one of Mr Hall's sons and in face of the opposition of the W.U. made a perfect success of that exchange. From here Mr Hubbard took me to Europe with him and I made the first exchange in Antwerp Belgium. It was here and later in Brussels that I came in more frequent contact with Mr Hubbard. As soon as I could be spared in Antwerp I had to go to Zurich, Switzerland, where I built the exchange under many difficulties brought about by jealous Govt. officials, then was ordered to Stuttgart, Germany to arrange for the winding-up of that business, which was interrupted by order of the Berlin Govt. Returning to headquarters at Brussels I helped in the union of the Gower and Bede companies with our own and united the three exchanges into one. Thence I was sent to Amsterdam, Holland and got that exchange fairly started, when I was again requisitioned for Brussels to take charge as chief engineer of the belgian company. After two years I was called to Stockholm where I united the three branch offices into one large Central and connected up the first Multiple switchboard on the european continent. From Stockholm I was sent to Guayaquil Ecuador, reconstructing and improving 2 successively Guayaquil, Iquique, Santiago and Valparaiso, opening up exchanges in various cities of Chile and building the first L.D. copper circuit south of the Rio Grande, between Valparaiso and Santiago. When the West Coast Telephone Co. sold its interests to an english Syndicate, the son-in-law of Prest Jackson was sent out from England to take my place and I returned to the U.S. where through Mr Hall's recommendation I was appointed as Gen Manager of

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the Great Southern Telephone Co. at New Orleans La. This company being absorbed by the Cumberland Co. and the position of Genl Manager of my company having been abolished, my contract was cancelled. I went to New York and Phila, where I made the underground construction which was then at its heighth, a special study and with my experience went to Buenos Aires, where I laid out and constructed greater part of that extensive system. In 1901 I came to Mexico City, and finding all the streets torn up for the purpose of laying down the new sewerage system, thought it a good opportunity to propose to the then Manager of the Mexican Telephone Co. to offer my co-operation and experience to convert the old single line aerial system into a modern underground cable plant. Mr Menzies thought that "iron overhead wires and magnetos are good enough for Mexico". It was then that I conceived the idea of obtaining an underground concession from the federal Govt. for myself, which after many hard struggles and efforts in U.S. and Europe I finally was able to interest the Ericssons in, for whom I continued to plan and construct a model and very extensive underground system with capacity of 100,000 subscribers, 12,000 of whom are actually working. Mr Menzies apparently saw his error, and subsequently, after the asphalt pavement had already been completed, laid down his ducts, naturally at an increased cost of \$ 10.00 per meter for the tearing up and re-laying of the pavement, which he could have avoided, if he had taken my advice in 1901. Besides, he would have had the monopoly of the business, because no second company would have dared to come in against a modern equipment.

Mexico City being finished I came to Veracruz, and after obtaining two very valuable concessions, one for the whole State of Veracruz and the other with the federal Govt. for joint L.D. work between Veracruz and Mexico City via Puebla, Orizaba and Cordoba, laid down the underground ducts in the central part of the city with my own means. Afterwards interested the Henley's Telegraph Wks Co. in London and another friend on the Continent, and we then started in in all earnest to build a modern exchange in this place. In spite of the revolution which has been going on ever since the day on which we opened up our exchange, we have been doing quite well and had 650 subscribers working

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on May 31-st, where the formerly existing branch of the Mexican Telephone Co. could never obtain more than 70. Our profits were not as large as could have been expected in normal, peaceful times, principally because we could not organize our company with sufficient capital to open up the other important places and also because the federal Govt. could not comply with their obligations in regard to the L.D. lines, being without funds, but we paid expenses and even had a small surplus which we used for extension of the system. We would have probably bridged over the difficulties brought about by the 6 years revolution, had it not been for the labor troubles, encouraged by the Govt.—The demands of workmen and operators for impossible wages made our situation quite difficult. When at last the employees demanded to be paid in gold, while we were still receiving our rentals in depreciated paper money, we had to refuse, although ordered by the Governor to allow the increases. The end was, that the Govt. “intervened” in the business, as they have done with railroads, mines, banks and electric light and power plants, and they are running the plant now with their own officials. We have made our protest and claims through the Foreign Office in 3 London and have no doubt that the Govt will be ready to return the business to us any day, although we are in no special hurry to receive it until the situation is normalized and the Govt will be able financially to make good the damages.

My friends in London are excellent cable manufacturers and otherwise A.1 in every respect, but they are no telephone men, and consequently become discouraged too easily, which in the telephone business is a great fault; we all know, that this business, in order to be a success in the end, needs lots of nerve and undaunted driving, bordering on recklessness. My friends are afraid to risk any more money in this enterprise and I fear, that when the Govt returns the business to us and we shall have to reorganize and start with full energy to exploit all the advantages of our concessions, so as to build up a large and extensive business, we shall be lacking the necessary capital.

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I have communicated with my friends on this subject and find that they are quite willing to waive all profits and are willing to sell out their share for exactly what they have put into the business.

And now I come to a point which I present to you with hesitation, yet encouraged by my 39 years of pioneer work in our cause, and which I sincerely trust, you will not consider an uncalled for intrusion. It is as follows:

Having been away from U.S. so many years, I have lost almost all my connections in telephone circles, and without the recommendation of some prominent person it will be impossible for me to place myself in communication with telephone investors willing to study the question of transferring our concessions and property to an existing company or form a new one or enter with us with sufficient capital to carry out the original programme which the Veracruz Telephone Construction Syndicate Ltd. has set itself.

I should therefore consider it a great favour if you would kindly recommend me and my proposition to some of our old time friends and thus help one of the first, arduous and faithful workers for the great cause to at last reap some modest benefit out of his many years of effort, which many others who remained nearer home, and perhaps with less merit, have reached long ago.—

Hoping that God may preserve you in good health, to enjoy for many years to come the well earned fruits of your great mind, I remain dear Sir,

Yours very truly, P.O. Box 241 Veracruz Ver.